

## Tracing the agency of spalling concrete

Arriving into Sheffield by train, one is greeted by a vast concrete structure imposing on the urban landscape. Park Hill, a housing estate erected in 1961, once portrayed the vision of a promising future; today, most of it sits in neglect with a small section undergoing restoration. In this paper, the story of the spalling concrete in Park Hill is narrated by its exposed concrete surfaces and can be traced in three key moments of its life: its initial creation, its rediscovery by English Heritage following a long period of decline, and the current renovation.

The initial intentions of the architects and engineers were to create a new promising social condition using the material as a receptacle of their orders, in turn dictated by prevailing paradigms. Instead, the material has answered back to them: its on-site implementation, the traces on the material and the lives of users, all tell a different story. Concrete actively acts as an agent on the social, visual and technical performances desired by the architects, in all stages of the life of Park Hill. The listed estate is revisited through the lens of concrete to reveal a different story of its decline, its later recognition and its listing for historical importance. By tracing the damaged concrete in Park Hill through archival and bibliographic research and through a series of interviews with the actors and residents, the way the properties of the material shaped the outcome themselves are revealed.

The scope of this paper is not to simply provide a description of events, but to argue of the active agency of the material in shaping the architectural outcome.

Concrete describes its own story in Park Hill, different to the perceptions and aspirations of architects, engineers and planners attempted to infuse during its construction and ongoing transformation. The material has continuously shifted between identities and meanings; actively shaping the building but never seeking to be finalized, never fitting within a stable definition but always eluding them.